



Representative Joel Kretz

7th Legislative District

Rep. Joel Kretz

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State Government Operations
General Government Subcommittee

2007 Legislative Review

Working for Washington

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

It was a pleasure serving the 7th District in the Legislature again this session. I can't say the work was easy, but efforts to reach across the aisle and educate urban legislators about rural issues helped get some positive things done for our part of the state.

We had a lot on our plate this year with the 2-year state budget and more than 2,500 bills introduced in the House of Representatives alone. We also had a lot of big issues from education to health care and agriculture to property rights which needed to be addressed this year.

We made some progress and missed some obvious opportunities this session. This newsletter is meant to give you a quick overview of legislative highlights and information. If you have a specific issue you would like more information on, please feel free to contact me anytime. I can be reached at my Colville office at (509) 684-7355.

Thanks again for trusting me to represent you.

Sincerely,

Rep. Joel Kretz



Inside:

- The state budget
- 7th District receives \$22 million for projects
- Salmon recovery funds & accountability
- Forest health
- Huckleberry bill update

Washington's two-year budget – boom to bust

This year's budget was tough to swallow. For many reasons, I could not vote for it. It just spent too much, bet on a very strong economy that could turn on a dime and didn't prioritize spending. We had an estimated \$2 billion surplus this year and instead of saving it and offering some tax relief to families, budget writers spent it all.

The budget was a whopping \$33.4 billion, which amounts to a 33 percent increase in spending since Christine Gregoire took office. That's \$8.2 billion more than just two years ago. This budget, according to the governor's own fiscal analyst, will leave us more than \$1.3 billion in deficit in the 2009 budget. It simply is not responsible.

The bottom line is government must prioritize spending — the budget approved this year didn't do that. In a \$33.4 billion budget, not one program was cut and not one state program was deemed to be unworthy of further funding. That seems too good to be true — government programs running like a well-oiled machine? That's not even true in business — there is always room for improvement.

We all agree that taking care of our most vulnerable citizens and the hard-working families in the state is our top priority. Part of fulfilling that promise also includes being prudent and deliberative with tax dollars so that programs aren't cut in the future because of poor spending choices today.

“Huckleberry Bill” stirs up 7th District residents

Hundreds of constituent calls, emails and letters from upset huckleberry pickers helped jam up House legislation criminalizing the activity. The “Huckleberry Bill,” **House Bill 1040**, failed to receive a vote of the House before the March 14 deadline.

I've never seen as speedy a call to action as the ladies of Wauconda and huckleberry lovers around the district organized. I received hundreds of letters and emails and was happy to share them with anyone who was considering supporting the bill.

The bill would have allowed for the citation of local huckleberry pickers who possess or transport more than three gallons of huckleberries, either on their person or in their home, or both. The berries could be seized from any location, including a person's home, and given to the local Native American tribe.

Fortunately, the Legislature passed House Bill 1909, which bans the use of commercial rakes for huckleberry harvesting. Folks being bused in to pick huckleberries, mostly with rakes, have been leaving a trail of damaged bushes, which needed to be addressed.

We all want folks to harvest the berries without a restriction on the amount, but it's important that we leave the bushes in good condition for the next year's harvest, which the “rake ban” provision does.

Everyone in the 7th District deserves the credit for this victory!

Capital Budget includes \$22 million for 7th District projects



Miss Omak Stampede, Hannah McDaniel, poses with Shauna Beeman in the capitol rotunda during a visit to Olympia to meet with 7th District legislators in January.

Among the many projects allotted funds in this year's capital budget, \$4 million will go to repair and update the Okanogan Equestrian and Heritage Center. The funds will be spent to complete much-needed renovations on the arena, which hosts the annual Omak Stampede.

The arena is a cornerstone of the Omak community and generates a significant amount of revenue in the Okanogan Valley. In 2005 more than 60,000 visitors and community members attended a wide variety of equestrian events, motor sports, cultural and community events at the arena. These events generated revenue in excess of \$18 million for the region, which is vital to keeping area services available and keeping area businesses afloat.



State Representative Joel Kretz

This is a wise investment by the state. The arena is of critical economic and traditional importance to Omak and the surrounding region.

The remaining \$18 million will be spread around the district to pay for vital economic development, infrastructure and state park projects.

Property taxes, reinstating I-747 limits

Protecting Washington families against unaffordable property tax increases was something I fought for this session. Of the many issues constituents who called or emailed me about, property taxes was at the top of the list. Families just starting out and long-time home owners are being squeezed by rising property taxes, despite a clear directive to strictly limit annual property tax levy increases to 1 percent.

Washington citizens clearly said “no” to increasing property tax levies more than 1 percent each year when they overwhelmingly passed I-747 in 2001. Despite repeated efforts by House Republicans to reinstate the provisions in the initiative, we were unable to convince enough of my colleagues to support the bills.

I believe the Legislature should have upheld the wishes of the voters by retaining the limit. I will support legislation again next year to reinstate the 1 percent limit, assuring voters that government is responsive to their needs and their directives.

Salmon recovery funds need accountability

This year, the Upper Columbia Salmon Recovery Board asked for \$296 million of ratepayer and taxpayer money for salmon recovery projects. The original request was half that amount. That’s a lot of money which, surprisingly, was not tied to any accountability or benchmarking of the projects.

My legislation passed this year, **House Bill 1598**, will add accountability. Some of the financial information reported on the Upper Columbia Project showed an administrative worker being paid a whopping \$85 per hour, which the public has a right to know. Anytime public dollars are spent there should be a way for the public to see where the money is spent. This bill puts a “sunshine clause” into the process to allow for better tracking

of projects and how groups receiving the state-funded grants are using the funds.

Ultimately, it’s the public’s money and they should know where it’s going and if it’s making a difference.

Forest health is critical to 7th District

Our natural surroundings are the reason many of us live in the 7th District. Part of making sure our children can enjoy the same beauty is addressing forest health.

That’s why I introduced **House Bill 1122**. This important legislation would have allowed for removal of the expiration date for contract harvesting on state trust lands that have been identified as forests with health deficiencies. It would have also required the Department of Natural Resources to prioritize certain treatments for forest health by giving higher priority to the protection of public health and safety, public resources, and the long-term asset value of the trust.

We all benefit when we take care of things now instead of waiting until forests are destroyed by bugs, disease or fire. Both Senator Bob Morton’s and my legislation were passed over-

whelmingly; but Sen. Morton’s bill was signed. Working as a team, 7th District legislators often run companion bills (one in the House and one in the Senate) with the hope that if one bill gets held up, the other will pass. This measure is a big win for our district.

Protecting families, livestock

The 7th District has some unique challenges when it comes to wildlife management and control. To address these issues, I passed two bills dealing with cougar predation and livestock damage.

House Bill 1147 would have required the state Department of Fish and Wildlife to



Rep. Kretz stands on the House floor to explain his Salmon recovery funding accountability legislation, HB1598, to fellow legislators.

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compensate farmers and ranchers when their commercial livestock is injured or killed when the livestock owner suspects the attack was by cougars, bears or wolves. The bill's message was simple: When state law prevents farmers and ranchers from protecting their livestock, the state should bear some responsibility for the damage.

The second bill, **House Bill 1756**, authorizes the Department of Fish and Wildlife to add one additional season for pursuing or hunting cougars with the aid of dogs to the ongoing pilot project.

It also provides a mechanism for counties other than Ferry, Stevens, Pend Oreille, Chelan, and Okanogan to participate in the cougar hunting pilot project created by the 2004 Legislature.

Both of these issues are about fairness — it's not fair to put the complete burden of the state's mismanagement of wildlife onto ranchers and families.

House Bill 1147 didn't pass this year, but House Bill 1756 passed and was signed April 21.

Cost, disability shouldn't hinder outdoor recreation opportunities

I was pleased to sponsor **House Bill 1079** this year allowing for veterans and disabled citizens to take advantage of the great outdoors. Working with the Fish and Wildlife Commission, I introduced this legislation to extend recreational opportunities for disabled citizens in our state.

This year's legislation compliments my 2005 legislation, HB 1405, by creating an expanded definition of "person with a disability" in the Fish and Wildlife Code and reducing the rate to \$5 for a fishing license to persons with developmental disabilities, people who are blind, and honorably discharged armed services veterans with a disability arising from military service.

The 7th District is full of opportunities to hunt, fish, hike, bike and picnic. It's nice to continue the work I started on this issue in my first session. This issue was a top priority for me and the Fish and Wildlife Commission. House Bill 1079 was signed May 1.

Doing the right thing gets noticed

This year I was honored to receive two awards from agriculture groups who represent thousands of ranchers, farmers, orchardists and family farms/small businesses around the state.

In February, I received the State Representative of the Year award from the Cattle Producers of Washington (CPoW), which represents the market interests of Washington's live cattle producers and promotes the heritage of ranching and farming for present and future generations.

The Washington Farm Bureau recognized me this year for my work on property rights and protections as a private citizen and as a state representative. This issue is near and dear to my heart because all of us want to enjoy the American dream and part of that is land and home ownership. I believe it should be difficult for the government to take or restrict the use of private land.



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